

United States Courts  
Southern District of Texas  
FILED

JUN 22 2017

David J. Bradley, Clerk of Court

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
HOUSTON DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

CHUCOBIE LANIER,  
Defendant.

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CRIMINAL NO. H-15-080

**PLEA AGREEMENT**

The United States of America, by and through Abe Martinez, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas, and Robert S. Johnson, Assistant United States Attorney, and the defendant, Chucobie Lanier ("Defendant"), and Defendant's counsel, pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(A) and 11(c)(1)(B) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, state that they have entered into an agreement, the terms and conditions of which are as follows:

**Defendant's Agreement**

1. Defendant agrees to plead guilty to Count One of the Indictment. Count One charges Defendant with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and bank fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349. Defendant, by entering this plea, agrees that he/she is waiving any right to have the facts that the law makes essential to the punishment either charged in the indictment, or proved to a jury or proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

**Punishment Range**

2. The statutory maximum penalty for each violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349, is imprisonment of not more than 30 years and a fine of not more than \$1,000,000. Additionally, Defendant may receive a term of supervised release after imprisonment of up to 5 years. See Title 18, United States Code, sections 3559(a) and 3583(b)(2). Defendant acknowledges and understands that if he/she should violate the conditions of any period of

supervised release which may be imposed as part of his/her sentence, then Defendant may be imprisoned for the entire term of supervised release, without credit for time already served on the term of supervised release prior to such violation. *See* Title 18, United States Code, sections 3559(a) and 3583(e)(3). Defendant understands that he/she cannot have the imposition or execution of the sentence suspended, nor is he/she eligible for parole.

#### **Mandatory Special Assessment**

3. Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, section 3013(a)(2)(A), immediately after sentencing, Defendant will pay to the Clerk of the United States District Court a special assessment in the amount of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per count of conviction. The payment will be by cashier's check or money order, payable to the Clerk of the United States District Court, c/o District Clerk's Office, P.O. Box 61010, Houston, Texas 77208, Attention: Finance.

#### **Immigration Consequences**

4. Defendant recognizes that pleading guilty may have consequences with respect to his/her immigration status if he/she is not a citizen of the United States. Defendant understands that if he/she is not a citizen of the United States, by pleading guilty he/she may be removed from the United States, denied citizenship, and denied admission to the United States in the future. Defendant's attorney has advised Defendant of the potential immigration consequences resulting from Defendant's plea of guilty.

#### **Cooperation**

5. The parties understand this agreement carries the potential for a motion for departure under Section 5K1.1 of the Sentencing Guidelines. Defendant understands and agrees that whether such a motion is filed will be determined solely by the United States through the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas. Should Defendant's cooperation, in the sole

judgment and discretion of the United States, amount to “substantial assistance,” the United States reserves the sole right to file a motion for departure pursuant to Section 5K1.1 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines. Defendant further agrees to persist in that plea through sentencing, fully cooperate with the United States, not oppose the forfeiture of assets contemplated in paragraph 22 of this agreement. Defendant understands and agrees that the United States will request that sentencing be deferred until that cooperation is complete.

6. Defendant understands and agrees that “fully cooperate,” as that term is used herein, includes providing all information relating to any criminal activity known to Defendant, including but not limited to mortgage fraud. Defendant understands that such information includes both state and federal offenses arising therefrom. In that regard:

- (a) Defendant agrees that this plea agreement binds only the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Texas and Defendant; it does not bind any other United States Attorney or any other unit of the Department of Justice;
- (b) Defendant agrees to testify truthfully as a witness before a grand jury or in any other judicial or administrative proceeding when called upon to do so by the United States. Defendant further agrees to waive his/her Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination for the purpose of this agreement;
- (c) Defendant agrees to voluntarily attend any interviews and conferences as the United States may request;
- (d) Defendant agrees to provide truthful, complete and accurate information and testimony and understands any false statements made by the defendant to the Grand Jury or at any court proceeding (criminal or civil), or to a government agent or attorney, can and will be prosecuted under the appropriate perjury, false statement, or obstruction statutes;
- (e) Defendant agrees to provide to the United States all documents in his/her possession or under his/her control relating to all areas of inquiry and investigation; and

(f) Should the recommended departure, if any, not meet Defendant's expectations, the Defendant understands that he/she remains bound by the terms of this agreement and cannot, for that reason alone, withdraw his/her plea.

### **Waiver of Appeal and Collateral Review**

7. Defendant is aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 1291, and Title 18, United States Code, section 3742, afford a defendant the right to appeal the conviction and sentence imposed. Defendant is also aware that Title 28, United States Code, section 2255, affords the right to contest or “collaterally attack” a conviction or sentence after the judgment of conviction and sentence has become final. Defendant knowingly and voluntarily waives the right to appeal or “collaterally attack” the conviction and sentence, except that Defendant does not waive the right to raise a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel on direct appeal, if otherwise permitted, or on collateral review in a motion under Title 28, United States Code, section 2255. In the event Defendant files a notice of appeal following the imposition of the sentence or later collaterally attacks his conviction or sentence, the United States will assert its rights under this agreement and seek specific performance of these waivers.

8. In agreeing to these waivers, Defendant is aware that a sentence has not yet been determined by the Court. Defendant is also aware that any estimate of the possible sentencing range under the sentencing guidelines that he/she may have received from his/her counsel, the United States or the Probation Office, is a prediction and not a promise, did not induce his/her guilty plea, and is not binding on the United States, the Probation Office or the Court. The United States does not make any promise or representation concerning what sentence the defendant will receive. Defendant further understands and agrees that the United States Sentencing Guidelines are “effectively advisory” to the Court. *See United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005).

Accordingly, Defendant understands that, although the Court must consult the Sentencing Guidelines and must take them into account when sentencing Defendant, the Court is not bound to follow the Sentencing Guidelines nor sentence Defendant within the calculated guideline range.

9. Defendant understands and agrees that each and all waivers contained in the Agreement are made in exchange for the concessions made by the United States in this plea agreement.

#### **The United States' Agreements**

10. The United States agrees to each of the following:

(a) If Defendant pleads guilty to Count One of the indictment and persists in that plea through sentencing, and if the Court accepts this plea agreement, the United States will move to dismiss any remaining counts of the indictment at the time of sentencing;

(b) If the Court determines that Defendant qualifies for an adjustment under section 3E1.1(a) of the United States Sentencing Guidelines, and the offense level prior to operation of section 3E1.1(a) is 16 or greater, the United States will move under section 3E1.1(b) for an additional one-level reduction because Defendant timely notified authorities of his or her intent to plead guilty, thereby permitting the United States to avoid preparing for trial and permitting the United States and the Court to allocate their resources more efficiently.

#### **Agreement Binding - Southern District of Texas Only**

11. The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas agrees that it will not further criminally prosecute Defendant in the Southern District of Texas for offenses arising from conduct charged in the indictment. This plea agreement binds only the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas and Defendant. It does not bind any other United States Attorney's Office. The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas will bring this plea agreement and the full extent of Defendant's cooperation to the attention of other prosecuting offices, if requested.

### **United States' Non-Waiver of Appeal**

12. The United States reserves the right to carry out its responsibilities under guidelines sentencing. Specifically, the United States reserves the right:

- (a) to bring its version of the facts of this case, including its evidence file and any investigative files, to the attention of the Probation Office in connection with that office's preparation of a presentence report;
- (b) to set forth or dispute sentencing factors or facts material to sentencing;
- (c) to seek resolution of such factors or facts in conference with Defendant's counsel and the Probation Office;
- (d) to file a pleading relating to these issues, in accordance with section 6A1.2 of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Title 18, United States Code, section 3553(a); and
- (e) to appeal the sentence imposed or the manner in which it was determined.

### **Sentence Determination**

13. Defendant is aware that the sentence will be imposed after consideration of the United States Sentencing Guidelines and Policy Statements, which are only advisory, as well as the provisions of Title 18, United States Code, section 3553(a). Defendant nonetheless acknowledges and agrees that the Court has authority to impose any sentence up to and including the statutory maximum set for the offense(s) to which Defendant pleads guilty, and that the sentence to be imposed is within the sole discretion of the sentencing judge after the Court has consulted the applicable Sentencing Guidelines. Defendant understands and agrees that the parties' positions regarding the application of the Sentencing Guidelines do not bind the Court and that the sentence imposed is within the discretion of the sentencing judge. If the Court should impose any sentence up to the maximum established by statute, or should the Court order any or all of the sentences

imposed to run consecutively, Defendant cannot, for that reason alone, withdraw a guilty plea, and will remain bound to fulfill all of the obligations under this plea agreement.

### **Rights at Trial**

14. Defendant understands that by entering into this agreement, he/she surrenders certain rights as provided in this plea agreement. Defendant understands that the rights of a defendant include the following:

(a) If Defendant persisted in a plea of not guilty to the charges, defendant would have the right to a speedy jury trial with the assistance of counsel. The trial may be conducted by a judge sitting without a jury if Defendant, the United States, and the court all agree.

(b) At a trial, the United States would be required to present witnesses and other evidence against Defendant. Defendant would have the opportunity to confront those witnesses and his/her attorney would be allowed to cross-examine them. In turn, Defendant could, but would not be required to, present witnesses and other evidence on his/her own behalf. If the witnesses for Defendant would not appear voluntarily, he/she could require their attendance through the subpoena power of the court; and

(c) At a trial, Defendant could rely on a privilege against self-incrimination and decline to testify, and no inference of guilt could be drawn from such refusal to testify. However, if Defendant desired to do so, he/she could testify on his/her own behalf.

### **Factual Basis for Guilty Plea**

15. Defendant is pleading guilty because he is in fact guilty of the charges contained in Count One of the Indictment. If this case were to proceed to trial, the United States could prove each element of the offense beyond a reasonable doubt. The following facts, among others, would be offered to establish Defendant's guilt:

From approximately 2005 through 2009, defendant CHOCOBIE LANIER and others who worked for A. Cole Realty Group in Houston, Texas engaged in a mortgage fraud scheme.

As a representative of the realty group, LANIER met with defendant Kirk Brannan and offered to introduce him to Adrian Cole and A. Cole Realty Group in order to obtain buyers for a number of beach homes that Brannan owned in Surfside and Freeport, Texas. Cole proposed that Kirk Brannan sell the beach homes to buyers that A. Cole Realty would recruit. The sales would be at inflated prices, and Brannan would kickback to LANIER and A. Cole Realty a portion of the sales proceeds that were above an agreed-upon amount. Brannan agreed to the arrangement.

The realty group obtained appraisals for Brannan's beach homes that supported grossly inflated valuations, sales prices, and loan amounts. Real estate appraisals are normally based on the sales prices (known as "comps") of at least three comparable parcels of real estate in the same area as the subject property. In order to obtain the high comps that would support the inflated appraisals required for the scheme, an associate of the realty group came up with a plan to manufacture fake comps for the Surfside/Freeport area.

Under this plan, Brannan was to conduct three "paper sales" of properties at inflated prices. Accordingly, Brannan "sold" three of his beach homes, each one day apart, to Brannan family members at extremely high prices. No money changed hands in these purported sales. However, as a result, Brannan created HUD-1 Settlement Statements for the alleged sales and supplied these settlement statements that reflected the high sales prices to appraisers who then used the settlement statements as comps to support inflated valuations of the rest of Brannan's properties. These inflated valuations induced lenders, including Well Fargo Bank, to loan far more money for the purchase of Brannan's remaining properties than the properties were actually worth.

Defendants Morris, Blackshear, and others associated with the realty group recruited and



paid individuals known as “straw buyers” to sign mortgage loan documents for the purchase of Brannan’s beach homes, even though the straw buyers had no intention of residing at the properties or repaying the loans. In addition, material false information was listed in the mortgage loan applications, including misrepresentations about the straw buyers’ marital status, employment, monthly income and assets, and misrepresentations that the straw buyers had the ability to repay the loans and intended to reside at the properties.

Banks, including Wells Fargo Bank, made mortgage loans to the straw buyers for the purchase of Brannan’s beach homes. Wells Fargo Bank is a financial institution that is insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), an agency of the United States. In making these loans, the banks relied upon the appraisals that grossly inflated the value of the beach homes, and they relied upon the false information listed in the straw buyers’ loan applications.

Brannan’s beach homes sold at prices far above market rates. Typically, each time a beach home was sold to a straw buyer, Brannan, through his entities or family members, kicked-back to LANIER approximately half of the proceeds of the sale. Brannan or a Brannan family member failed to record the kickback transaction on the HUD-1 Settlement Statement for the sale. After receiving the excess sales proceeds from Brannan, LANIER forwarded the funds to others associated with the realty group, including Morris and Blackshear, who then paid the straw buyers their share of the fraudulently obtained loan funds.

As part of the scheme with LANIER, Brannan sold a beach property at 319 Francis Cove, Freeport, Texas to a straw buyer known by the initials R.V. Wells Fargo financed the sale. On December 11, 2006, Wells Fargo wired its loan funds from Des Moines Iowa to the title company in Houston, Texas. LANIER distributed \$283,706 of the excess Wells Fargo loan funds

to his associates at the realty group who were involved in the scheme. From these funds, defendant Morris paid the straw buyer R.V. \$111,817.

Morris, Blackshear, and the straw buyers failed to make payments on the loans for the purchase of the beach homes, resulting in losses to the lenders and causing the beach homes to go into foreclosure. Brannan sold at least ten beach homes through this process, resulting in total of losses to Wells Fargo and other lenders of approximately \$5,317,350.

#### **Breach of Plea Agreement**

16. If Defendant should fail in any way to fulfill completely all of the obligations under this plea agreement, the United States will be released from its obligations under the plea agreement, and Defendant's plea and sentence will stand. If at any time Defendant retains, conceals, or disposes of assets in violation of this plea agreement, or if Defendant knowingly withholds evidence or is otherwise not completely truthful with the United States, then the United States may move the Court to set aside the guilty plea and reinstate prosecution. Any information and documents that have been disclosed by Defendant, whether prior to or subsequent to this plea agreement, and all leads derived therefrom, will be used against defendant in any prosecution.

#### **Restitution, Forfeiture, and Fines – Generally**

17. This Plea Agreement is being entered into by the United States on the basis of Defendant's express representation that he/she will make a full and complete disclosure of all assets over which he/she exercises direct or indirect control, or in which he/she has any financial interest. Defendant agrees not to dispose of any assets or take any action that would effect a transfer of property in which he/she has an interest, unless Defendant obtains the prior written permission of the United States.

18. Defendant agrees to make complete financial disclosure by truthfully executing a sworn financial statement (Form OBD-500 or similar form) within 14 days of signing this plea agreement. Defendant agrees to authorize the release of all financial information requested by the United States, including, but not limited to, executing authorization forms permitting the United States to obtain tax information, bank account records, credit histories, and social security information. Defendant agrees to discuss and answer any questions by the United States relating to Defendant's complete financial disclosure.

19. Defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to pass clear title to forfeitable assets to the United States and to assist fully in the collection of restitution and fines, including, but not limited to, surrendering title, executing a warranty deed, signing a consent decree, stipulating to facts regarding the transfer of title and the basis for the forfeiture, and signing any other documents necessary to effectuate such transfer. Defendant also agrees to direct any banks which have custody of his/her assets to deliver all funds and records of such assets to the United States.

20. Defendant understands that forfeiture, restitution, and fines are separate components of sentencing and are separate obligations.

### **Restitution**

21. Defendant agrees to pay full restitution to the victim(s) regardless of the count(s) of conviction. Defendant stipulates and agrees that as a result of his criminal conduct, the victim(s) incurred a monetary loss of at least \$5,317,350. Defendant understands and agrees that the Court will determine the amount of restitution to fully compensate the victim(s). Defendant agrees that restitution imposed by the Court will be due and payable immediately and that Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant

waives the right to challenge in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding, the restitution order imposed by the Court.

### **Forfeiture**

22. Defendant stipulates and agrees that the factual basis for his/her guilty plea supports the forfeiture of at least \$5,317,350 against him/her and in favor of the United States, and Defendant agrees to the imposition of a personal money judgment for that amount against him/her and in favor of the United States of America. Defendant stipulates and admits that one or more of the conditions set forth in Title 21, United States Code, section 853(p), exists. Defendant agrees to forfeit any of his/her property, or his/her interest in property, up to the value of any unpaid portion of the money judgment, until the money judgment is fully satisfied.

23. Defendant agrees to waive any and all interest in any asset which is the subject of a related administrative or judicial forfeiture proceeding, whether criminal or civil, federal or state.

24. Defendant consents to the order of forfeiture becoming final as to Defendant immediately following this guilty plea, pursuant to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 32.2(b)(4)(A).

25. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the forfeiture of property in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

### **Fines**

26. Defendant understands that under the Sentencing Guidelines the Court is permitted to order Defendant to pay a fine that is sufficient to reimburse the government for the costs of any imprisonment or term of supervised release, if any. Defendant agrees that any fine imposed by


the Court will be due and payable immediately, and Defendant will not attempt to avoid or delay payment. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 7 above, Defendant waives the right to challenge the fine in any manner, including by direct appeal or in a collateral proceeding.

**Complete Agreement**

27. This written plea agreement, consisting of 15 pages, including the attached addendum of Defendant and his/her attorney, constitutes the complete plea agreement between the United States, Defendant, and Defendant's counsel. No promises or representations have been made by the United States except as set forth in writing in this plea agreement. Defendant acknowledges that no threats have been made against him/her and that he/she is pleading guilty freely and voluntarily because he/she is guilty.

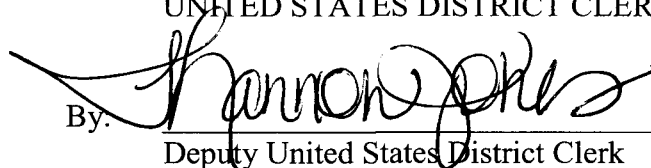
28. Any modification of this plea agreement must be in writing and signed by all parties.

Filed at Houston, Texas, on June 22, 2017.

  
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Defendant

Subscribed and sworn to before me on JUNE 22, 2017.

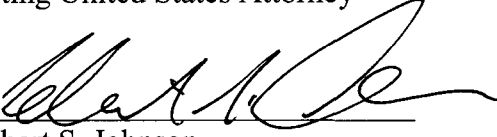
DAVID J. BRADLEY, Clerk  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT CLERK

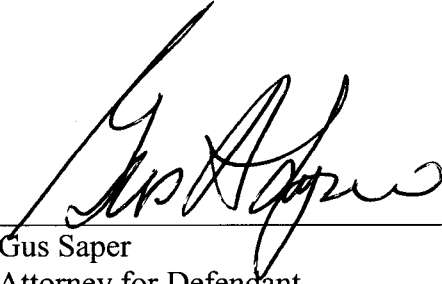
By:   
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Deputy United States District Clerk

APPROVED:

Abe Martinez  
Acting United States Attorney

By:

  
Robert S. Johnson  
Assistant United States Attorney  
Southern District of Texas

  
Gus Saper  
Attorney for Defendant

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
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CRIMINAL NO. H-15-080

PLEA AGREEMENT -- ADDENDUM

I have fully explained to Defendant his/her rights with respect to the pending indictment. I have reviewed the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual and Policy Statements and I have fully and carefully explained to Defendant the provisions of those Guidelines which may apply in this case. I have also explained to Defendant that the Sentencing Guidelines are only advisory and the court may sentence Defendant up to the maximum allowed by statute per count of conviction. Further, I have carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with Defendant. To my knowledge, Defendant's decision to enter into this agreement is an informed and voluntary one.

  
Attorney for Defendant

6-22-2017  
Date

I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand all my rights with respect to the indictment pending against me. My attorney has fully explained, and I understand, all my rights with respect to the provisions of the United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines Manual which may apply in my case. I have read and carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with my attorney. I understand this agreement and I voluntarily agree to its terms.

  
Defendant

6-22-2017  
Date